



CITY OF SAN JOSÉ, CALIFORNIA

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SAN JOSÉ ELECTIONS COMMISSION

Thomas Mertens, Chair
Fred de Funiak, Vice Chair
Jang Badhesha
April Lin Walsh

SAN JOSÉ ELECTIONS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES November 15, 2006

Special Meeting

I CALL TO ORDER

The Members of the San José Elections Commission convened at 5:34 p.m. in Room 2 of Berryessa Community Center, 3050 Berryessa Road, San José, CA 95132 to discuss the concept of public financing of city council and mayoral candidate campaigns.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS Badhesha, deFuniak, Walsh, and Chair Mertens

ABSENT: COMMISSIONERS None

STAFF PRESENT: Consultant Alex Stuart
Chief Deputy City Attorney Norm Sato
City Clerk Lee Price
Deputy City Clerk Michelle Estabillo

Public Comments:

- The system in place is better than not having one
- All agreed that the system could be improved
- Independent expenditures are still there with no limits
- (Virginia Holtz) Current amounts have been in place for years – tie it to CPI or other index; mailing/postage costs are higher than when put in place. Graduated basis according to inflation over time – may reduce some pressure (independent expenditures)
- (Virginia Holtz) Independent expenditures have own message, but in public's mind, it's all the same. Candidates have lost control over the message that goes out
- Internet as a tool – but depends on age of voters, area, demographics – balance all (mail, flyers, and computers)

Public Comments (continued)

- Younger generation more comfortable with internet than the older generation
- Personal contact still the best way to campaign – neighbor to neighbor
- Concerns regarding voter participation – publicly funded equals greater participation (reference Maine and Arizona)
- Would rather greet face-to-face with candidate - persona forum, town hall, door-to-door campaign more effective
- Television is the most effective way to campaign; “quick-hit”
- (Allburg) ???
- One individual thinks that a \$250 contribution will create a sense of obligation by the candidate (several agreed). The personal contact creates a relationship.
- \$250 will get contributors in the door, but not buy a vote – the issues are bigger. \$250 is a drop in the bucket
- Public money pays for the services. Matching funds will raise the _____. Believes that campaigns should also be financed with public money. Does public equal access?
- If can't control independent expenditures, you probably can't do much
- (Virginia Holtz) Public financing could create more independent expenditure committees. The money would go somewhere else.
- In Maine, when a candidate said he took “clean money”, it created a better perception by the public
- After of a couple of election cycles in Maine, the public realized the benefit.
- The City does not get enough diversity because of the limitations (time, money, fundraising ability, commitment)
- Vietnamese community is very in tune with development by Vietnamese. It depends on the district in which you live – the more culturally diverse districts, the need for more culturally diverse representatives
- Can the community look at changing the way the money is spent (Consultant replies no – unconstitutional)
- Before candidates are even aware of elections; there are sign of people who aren't registered to vote (younger, moved here from other countries). Public financing won't help that (unless they vote, they won't run for office)
- Public funding will help the younger generation; may also eliminate stereotyping of other cultures/ethnicities
- This would be an experiment, encounter issues/loopholes as they come up.
- Doesn't matter what rules you set, someone will go around them, find a loophole. When you find one, change the rules to close it.
- If the City has public financing, the candidates will have less time fundraising (consensus). Would it increase candidates opportunities to do more interacting with voters? Maybe – no one knows.
- Issue – number of candidates in one race
- \$50 contribution less influence than \$250 (several people agreed with this)
- Its not how much a candidate can spend but how many people choose to support the candidate (democracy)
- Collecting one hundred \$5 checks could eliminate the frivolous candidates
- \$5 still buys influence

Public Comments (continued):

- Provide excess money to keep level playing field (give more money to a candidate who is unfairly treated by another candidate who does not accept public financing)
- If the City does level the playing field by providing excess money, over time the public may reject that concept
- Consensus – with public financing keep voluntary spending limit cap
- Implementation is the big issue
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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

THOMAS M. (TOM) MERTENS, CHAIR

ATTEST:

LEE PRICE, MMC
CITY CLERK and SECRETARY TO THE COMMISSION